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Press prosecution threat still holds, Casey insists

By Ed Rogers
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CIA Director William Casey said yesterday that the White House had not forced him to retreat from his threat to prosecute anyone who illegally prints or broadcasts secret communications intelligence.

Mr. Casey was asked on the weekly television show, "John McLaughlin: One on One," about reports in early May that he was considering asking the Justice Department to prosecute publications that violate a 1950 criminal statute.

"There's a story around town that you are now in retreat ... and that you have been called off by the White House," John McLaughlin, the show's host, told Mr. Casey.

"That's a false story," Mr. Casey said, "entirely false. It is hard to understand how you can fail ... to protect what the law requires you to protect. So nobody's called me off. Nobody will try to call me off."

Mr. McLaughlin said he had reported two years ago that Soviet submarines were spying on the U.S. Trident submarine in Puget Sound, and commented, "It is so well known that it [publishing it] makes really no difference."

"You're absolutely wrong, John," Mr. Casey said. "You're dead, cock-

eyed wrong. The Soviets — how do you know what the Soviets know? How do you know what details they need to effectively counter what we can do? You can't know."

"The law is pure and simple," he said. "It says publication of information about communications intelligence is illegal."

The law was enacted after U.S. interception of German and Japanese communications in World War II had saved "many, many thousands of lives and cut the war short a few years," Mr. Casey said.

"One little whisper of that in the media would have enabled the Germans and Japanese to turn that off and the war would have been prolonged, many more lives would have been lost," he said.

At that point, Mr. McLaughlin pointed out that the forbidden information could not be published if government officials did not leak it.

"John, I want it both ways," Mr. Casey said. "I want to stop the leaks internally, and I want the press to cooperate in not publishing information that is damaging to our national security and damaging to the safety of our citizens."

Mr. McLaughlin then referred to NBC's recent interview with Abu Abbas — wanted by several nations as the alleged mastermind behind various terrorist acts — at a location

that NBC refused to disclose. He said he had learned from a government source that it was in Algeria.

"Now we don't know where every one of these guys are," Mr. Casey said. "They have armed guards. They hide and they move all the time. And we just can't send people in to interview on a contractual basis the way the NBC did."

Mr. Casey said the CIA has a significant intelligence capability in the Middle East, with "very close relationships with other governments."

"We have been able to warn against, cause action to be taken or abort better than 100 planned terrorist attacks over the last year, and that's a pretty considerable capability," Mr. Casey said.

Asked to compare the CIA with its Soviet counterpart, Mr. Casey said the KGB is a much larger organization with an internal police function as well as foreign intelligence responsibilities.

"We think we're better, have better analytical capabilities. They probably have more people out around the world carrying on trouble-making and spying activities. We think our people are smarter. The Soviets, over the last three years, they've had a couple of hundred of their agents kicked out from countries around the world."